The Spaniards Called It

STORY OF THE COAST
By George Nicholson

ESPERANZA

and So Did Capt. Cook

SPANISH NAMES predominate on Esperanza Inlet. The reason is obvious, for it was named by Captain Alexandro Malaspina, whose officers, Lieutenants Espinosa and Cevallos, examined this part of the West Coast of Vancouver Island in 1791.

Capt. James Cook had previously (in 1778) named it Hope Bay, "as with mountainous land around there was hope for a good harbor," in which he was not mistaken. The name given on Cook's chart was undoubtedly translated by the Spaniards and applied to the inlet, in which there appeared the greatest possibility of a secure anchorage (Walbran).

Catala Island, wooded and uninhabited, stands on the west side of the entrance to the inlet. It was named on Galiano's chart of 1792 as Isle de Catala, after the Rev. Magin Catala, a Franciscan monk who for 44 years was engaged on Spanish-American coast missionary work. He served 13 months (1793-1794) at Nootka, during the Spanish occupation of Friendly Cove.

The headland at the western entrance is known at Tatchu Point, the ancient Indian name for this locality and derived from the word "tatchttatcha," to chew. There is a fine beach here, and it was a great fishing place for the Ehattisat Indians (the tribe which inhabited these parts), and much food was consumed there at feasts and entertainments. (Rev. A. J. Brabant). The name was adopted by Admiralty surveyers in 1861.

Ferrer Point, originally named Ensanada de Ferrer, by Galiano and Valdez in 1792, guards the southern entrance. The RCAF maintained a radar station here during the Second World War.

The main steamer channel was named by the Hydrographic Survey Board of Canada after Capt. E. Gillam, for 20 years master of the C.P.R. steamer Princess Maquinna, and the Tees before that.

The inlet separates the northern portion of Nootka Island from Vancouver Island proper. Hecate Channel and Tahsis Narrows, the latter only a few hundred feet wide, connects it with Tahsis Inlet, thus forming a waterway, navigable for ships of any size, completely round Nootka Island.

Its four principal arms are Port Eliza, Espinosa Arm and Zeballos Arm, all on the Vancouver Island side, and Nuchalitz Inlet which makes a deep indentation into Nootka Island.

Port Eliza, the smallest, was named after the able Spanish naval officer, Lieutenant Francisco Eliza, who was in command of an expedition consisting of three vessels, the frigate Conception, the snow San Carlos and the sloop Princess Real, which were despatched from San Blas by the Viceroy of Mexico, Count Revillagigedo, Feb. 3, 1790, to occupy Nootka. They arrived there on April 5.

Two mountain peaks in this area were also named after the same officer, Eliza Ears, 3,595 feet, and Eliza Dom, 2,960 feet. Both prominent landmarks from far out to sea, they are used by fishermen for taking cross bearings.

Acres of native oyster beds occur at the head of the inlet, from which thousands of sacks were once shipped to Vancouver and Seattle, but with the introduction of oyster (the larger species) farming nearer to the markets, the industry languished. Now they are free to anyone who wishes to gather them.

Immediately inside the entrance to Port Eliza, on the starboard hand, is Queen's Cove, an important salmon trolling centre during the summer months.

Espinosa Arm was also named by Malaspina, after Lieutenant Joseph de Espinosa. Only habitations are in a few small logging camps.

Zeballos Arm was named after Lieutenant Ciriaco Cevallos, another officer of Malaspina's expedition, consisting of the corvettes Descubierta and Atrevida. It was at the head of this arm, in 1935, that a spectacular gold rush occurred, and where half a dozen enterprising prospectors, all former unemployed fishermen, made fortunes.

Prior to then, the only sign of habitation consisted of two trappers' shacks on the beach. Within a year, a prosperous town with a population of 1,500 had arisen.

Gold, most of it in brick form, to the value of $13,000,000, was shipped to the mint at Ottawa during the next ten years. The mines closed down in 1945, not because the gold reserves were exhausted, but on account of the federal government "pegging" the price of gold at $35 an ounce, which made further operations unprofitable. "Privateer," the richest mine, was originally promoted by Victoria interests.

Zeballos is now an important trading centre and the site of one of the Tahsis Company's logging camps. Within two miles of the wharf is a mountain of high grade iron ore.

On the north side of Hecate Channel, eight miles from Zeballos, is Esperanza village. The Nootka Mission General Hospital is here, also a first class hotel. A mile further on is Ceepeecee, the settlement with a peculiar name and built around a cannery and reduction plant. As I happened to be around those parts when the place was "christened," I know how the name originated. It is the initials "C.P.C." spelled out into one word. The three capital letters stand for Canadian Packing Corporation, a subsidiary of the California Packing Corporation, which built the reduction plant in 1926. The name was submitted to and subseqeuntly adopted by the post office department when an office was established there.

Hecate, named after HM surveying vessel Hecate, a paddle-wheel sloop, 860 tons, five guns and brigantine rigged, is on Nootka Island immediately across the channel from Eperanza and Ceepeecee. This was formerly a pilchard reduction plant, but the houses and sheds are now used for residential and school purposes by the Nootka Mission Hospital.

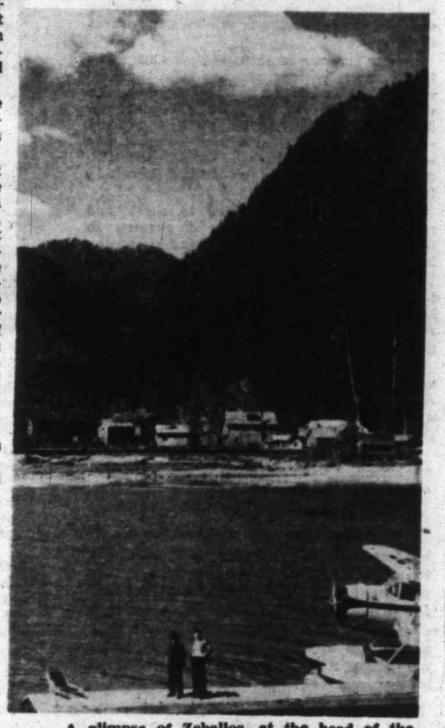
Hecate was a Greek Goddess of the Moon. Because the vessel which was named after her carried out such an extensive survey of this coast, many geogrophical features were named after it. The name appears at least 12 times on our charts.

Of the 26 pilchard reduction plants on the West Coast of Vancouver Island during the period 1925-1945, when that industry flourished, five were located at different points on Esperanza Inlet. Each represented a capital outlay of up to $250,000, employed about 75 fishermen and a similar number of men ashore. The schools mysteriously disappeared in 1945 and there hasn't been a pilchard seen since.

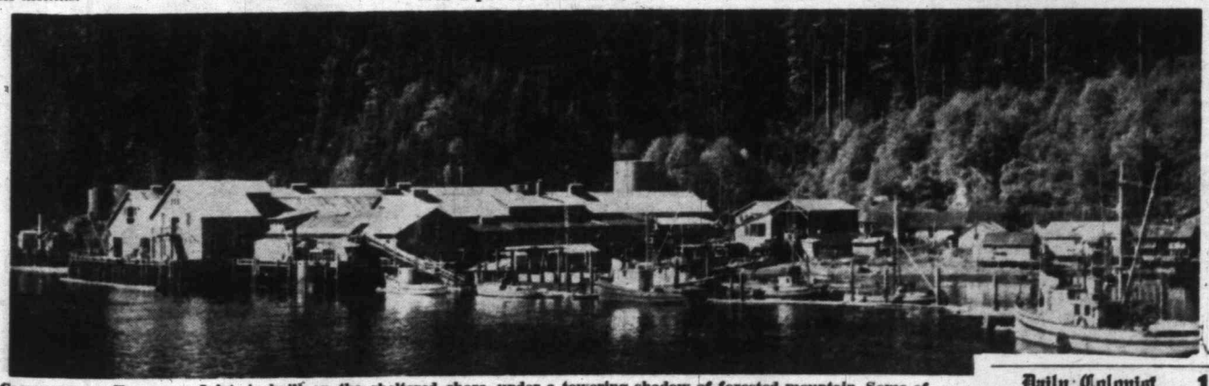
Prior to 1934, there were several dry salteries on the inlet, which put up chum salmon in the fall and herring during the winter months. Japanese owned the plants, but the fishing was done by whites and Indians. The product was shipped to China. The Sino-Japanese war put the industry out of business.

Meanwhile, the pilchard plants and salteries have all been dismantled. However, salmon and herring are as plentiful as ever, to provide profitable employment for several hundred fishermen, most of whom have made their homes on the shores of the inlet.

The Northland Navigation Company's MV Nootka Prince calls at all points on Esperanza Inlet once every week with supplies, and Pacific Western Airlines maintains a daily passenger and mail service.



A glimpse of Zeballos, at the head of the inlet of the same name, with a hint of the vast valley behind it.



Ceepeecee, on Esperanza Inlet, is built on the sheltered shore, under a towering shadow of forested mountain. Some of these west coast ports are remarkable for their beauty.